



NORTH DAKOTA
DEPARTMENT *of* HEALTH

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release:
May 16, 2008

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Department of Health Offers Tips for Protection Against Recreational Water Illnesses

BISMARCK, N.D. – Healthy swimming behaviors can greatly reduce the risk of recreational water illness from occurring and help stop germs from getting in the water, according to Julie Goplin, epidemiologist with the North Dakota Department of Health.

“Swimming in pools, lakes and rivers are a popular summer pastime in North Dakota,” Goplin said. “Ill or recently ill people who swim in recreational waters put others at risk.”

Recreational water illnesses (RWI) are spread by swallowing contaminated water from swimming pools, hot tubs, lakes, rivers and oceans. Last year, state and local health departments across the United States investigated more RWI outbreaks than ever before. This upsurge is being driven by an increase in the number of RWI outbreaks caused by cryptosporidium (“crypto”), a chlorine-resistant parasite, and is primarily associated with treated recreational water venues, such as pools and water parks. In North Dakota, the number of cases of crypto increased by 290 percent, from 20 cases in 2006 to 78 cases in 2007. Many people who became ill reported swimming in recreational water venues including pools and lakes.

The most commonly reported RWI is diarrhea, usually caused by parasites, primarily cryptosporidium and giardia, and by the bacteria shigella and *E. coli*. Children, pregnant women and people with weakened immune systems are at greatest risk of getting sick. Other RWIs can cause skin, ear, eye and respiratory infections.

The following tips can help prevent RWIs:

- Do not swim when you have diarrhea. This is especially important for children in diapers.
- Do not swallow pool, lake or river water and avoid getting water in your mouth.
- Practice good hygiene by taking a shower before and after swimming and wash your hands after using the toilet or changing diapers.

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Visit the health department home page at www.ndhealth.gov.

- Make sure children don't go to the bathroom in the water by taking them on bathroom breaks often. Make sure they wash their hands properly.
- Change diapers in a restroom and not pool-side or on the beach. Wash your hands after changing diapers.

For more information or to report a possible recreational water illness, contact Julie Goplin, North Dakota Department of Health, at 800.472.2180.

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